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IT has been a perpetual objection of declaimers againſt Providence in all ages, that good and evil are very irregularly diſtributed among mankind, and that the former is too often the portion of the vicious, and the latter of the virtuous. Numberleſs hypotheſes have been framed to reconcile theſe appearances to the idea of a moral SUPREME BEING: I ſhall mention only two at the preſent, as they have been employed by writers of a very different turn.

SOME

SOME of theſe writers aſſent to the truth of the fact, but endeavour to invalidate the concluſions raiſed on it, by arguments from reaſon and revelation for the proof of a future ſtate; in which the ſeeming and real inconſiſtencies of this life will be adjuſted agreeably to our ideas of a moral governor. Now objectors will anſwer, and indeed have anſwered, that arguments from reaſon to ſupport this doctrine are extremely inconcluſive. They may allow it is agreeable to the rules of juſt analogy to preſume that the attributes of the SUPREME BEING, which are imperfectly known in the preſent life, will be manifeſted more clearly to our apprehenſions in a future one: but they will call it an inverſion of all reaſonable arguments, to conclude from thence, that the moral attributes will be diſcoverable in another ſtate of being, when, by a confeſſion of the fact, that good and evil are ſo irregularly diſtributed, no appearances of theſe attributes are ſuppoſed to exiſt in the preſent ſyſtem, that book of nature, from which alone we collect that the author of it is good, as well as wiſe. As little will theſe objectors be influenced by arguments from revelation. To prove natural religion by revelation (which can itſelf be erected on no other principle) they will call but fantaſtic reaſoning in a circle. Revelation, they will ſay, preſuppoſes the following truths, and depends upon their certainty, that there is a GOD, and that ſuch evidences of his goodneſs and other attributes are diſcovered from his works, as in reaſon ſhould induce us to rely with confidence on thoſe oracles delivered to us as his word.

OTHER writers who have undertaken a defence of Providence, attempt it in a different manner. They affirm it is vain preſumption to imagine Man the final end

end of the creation, who may be formed ſubſerviently to nobler orders and ſyſtems of being: and that God governs by general, not particular laws; laws that reſpect our happineſs as a community, not as individuals. But the ſame objectors will again reply, that it is inconſiſtent with our idea of a being infinitely good, to conceive him determining any creature to miſery, however inferior in the order of general nature, or however formed relatively to ſuperior beings and ſyſtems. They will think it not more reconcileable with our idea of a being infinitely wiſe, to imagine him incapable of accommodating laws, however general, to the intereſt of every particular. They will deſire an explanation how laws can reſpect the happineſs of any ſyſtem, which are ſuppoſed too generally to be productive of miſery, even to the moſt valuable individuals that compoſe it.

This argument, drawn from the government of God by general, not particular laws, ſeems by no means to have been attended with the ſucceſs it was entitled to: and it appears to have failed of this end, not from a defect in the argument itſelf, but either becauſe it has been ill underſtood, or not purſued to it's full extent. When unbelievers declaim againſt the ſuppoſed unequal diſtribution of things, they in conſequence condemn the general laws from which they proceed. To reply then that God governs by general, not particular laws, is a repetition only of the foundation of their complaints, not an anſwer to them. There is another miſtake in the management of this argument. In the conſideration of the excellence of human laws, we are not content with viewing them intrinſically in themſelves; but compare them with the particular country, temper, manners, and other circumſtances of that people for whom

whom they are intended. Now in the conſideration of divine laws, we have not purſued the ſame method; and for this reaſon, among others, unbelievers have triumphed in the imagined weakneſs of one of the nobleſt arguments that has ever been employed in the nobleſt of cauſes, a defence of Providence.

God governs by general, not particular laws, becauſe the former alone are adapted to the condition of human kind. In this imperfect ſtate we are entirely unacquainted with the real nature of thoſe beings that ſurround us. We are ignorant from what principle or internal conſtitution they derive a power of operating on other beings, or in what manner the operation is performed. We have no knowledge of cauſes but in their effects, and in thoſe effects alone, which are groſsly viſible to our material organs. We ſuppoſe the ſame effects invariably produced from the ſame cauſes, except where a miraculous power interpoſes and ſupercedes for a moment the general courſe of nature, which reſumes it's former conſtancy, when the ſuperior influence that controuled it is removed. Such rare exceptions do not perplex our conduct, which is regulated by the general rule: but to deſtroy this general order as frequently as the imagined intereſt of individuals ſeems to us to require it, is to confound human knowledge, and, in conſequence, human action. The huſbandman commits his ſeed to the ground, with a preſumption that the earth retains all thoſe powers which promote vegitation. He concludes that the ſeaſons will return in their ſtated order; that the ſun will warm and invigorate, where it ſhines, and ſhowers cool and refreſh, where they fall, as in ancient times. Certain eſtabliſhed properties in matter, and certain eſtabliſhed laws of motion, are preſumed

ſumed in the meaneſt mechanical operation, nay, in the leaſt conſiderable actions of our lives.

Let us repreſent to ourſelves ſuch a ſyſtem of things exiſting, as, in the opinion of an objector to the preſent, would juſtify our conceptions of a moral ſupreme being. Let us imagine every element and power of nature, in the minuteſt as well as the greateſt inſtances, operating to the preſervation and advantage of the good; and on the contrary, concurring to produce miſery and deſtruction to the wicked. The good man inhabits a houſe with great ſecurity, whoſe walls decline near two feet from the perpendicular. He falls aſleep with a lighted candle at the bed-ſide, and the flame it produces, though ſufficient to conſume the dwellings of the wicked, plays but as a lambent vapour on his curtains. He drinks a glaſs of aqua fortis, by miſtake for the ſame quantity of champaigne, and finds it only an innocent enlivener of his ſpirits. The heats of ſummer, and the froſts of winter occaſion the ſame agreeable ſenſations. Rich wines and poignant ſauces attenuate his juices, and rectify the ſcorbutic habit of his body. The bad man, on the other hand, experiences very oppoſite effects. He ſits frozen with cold over that fire which communicates warmth to the reſt of the company at the extremity of the room. At another time he ſcalds his fingers by dipping them into cold water. A baſon of broth, or rice-milk intoxicates his brain. He acquires the ſtone and a complication of diſtempers from a vegetable diet: and at laſt concludes a miſerable being, by paſſing under an arch of ſolid ſtone, which his own iniquities draw down upon his head.

Let us reſt a moment to expreſs our admiration of ſuch a ſyſtem, and then enquire how the bulk of mankind,